

## PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

- 1. Quality education in today's world can best occur in an inclusive learning environment.**

**Rationale:** Schools are social and cultural institutions as well as institutions of learning. Students learn about and from one another during their school years. Students who attend schools with peers who differ from themselves acquire knowledge, skills and values essential to success in a diverse world and a global economy. Inclusion is essential to achieving both educational equity and raising levels of student achievement for all students.

- 2. School districts should engage the entire community in providing quality, inclusive learning environments in their schools.**

**Rationale:** It takes communication and collaboration between schools and business, labor, religious, human service, governmental, media and higher education components within a community to provide the necessary support services to families and students, which will create and sustain an inclusive climate in the community and in its schools. Schools cannot do it alone.

- 3. Choices and educational alternatives should be provided for students and their families.**

**Rationale:** It is desirable, but very difficult, for a school to be everything for everyone. No student should be required to attend a school that is isolated on the basis of race, national origin, socio-economic status, disability or gender even when that school is their school of residence. True inclusion is most successful when it is initiated locally and parents choose inclusive learning environments. Academic incentives as well as monetary incentives such as the provision of transportation must be provided for families choosing more inclusive learning environments.

- 4. Inclusion on the basis of socio-economic status should be an integral part of broader inclusion strategies.**

**Rationale:** Concentrated poverty among the student population creates a barrier to high academic achievement that is difficult to overcome.

5. **It is important for students to see the contributions and perspectives of persons like themselves and others who may be different reflected in their curriculum and learning environment.**

**Rationale:** If students do not see themselves reflected, their curriculum and learning environment, their motivation to learn and ultimately their achievement will suffer. If they do not see others, this omission reinforces the development of stereotypes and prejudice. Students must learn about our country's diversity, learn to respect and value that diversity and develop the skills to be successful participants in a diverse society and a global economy.

6. **Staff development related to inclusive instructional strategies as well as the design and implementation of a multicultural, gender-fair educational program is vital to creating and sustaining quality, inclusive learning environments.**

**Rationale:** Educators cannot teach effectively what they do not know or have not experienced. In-service and pre-service training for educators must address the issue of inclusive instruction and multicultural, gender-fair curriculum.

7. **Parental and family involvement in the learning process is essential to developing and sustaining quality, inclusive learning environments.**

**Rationale:** Parents, guardians and family are a student's first and primary teachers. For this reason, there must be an emphasis on and support for strategies that facilitate and sustain parental/family involvement in the learning process of their children. This emphasis and support is particularly crucial for parents whose children are attending schools other than their school of residence.

8. **School staff members should reflect the diversity of the schools' student population and ideally should reflect the diversity of the broader society. There should be a renewed commitment on the part of the state, local districts and colleges to recruit, train, hire and retain staff members of diverse backgrounds.**

**Rationale:** Teachers, administrators and other staff members serve as role mentors for the students in the schools. Diversity of perspectives and experiences among staff members strengthen the schools' efforts to insure that all students achieve at a high level.

**9. Educational resources including school attendance centers should be equitably distributed across all areas of a school district regardless of the demographic makeup of the area.**

**Rationale:** All parents and students regardless of their race, national origin, gender, disability religion, or socio-economic status deserve equitable access to the educational programs and activities of the district. Because concentrated poverty presents significant barriers to learning, equitable distribution of resources does not mean equal resources. Schools that house higher concentrations of poor students need more educational resources and broader based support systems to obtain the same academic objectives.

**10. Strong leadership at the state and local levels is essential to the development and maintenance of inclusive schools and communities.**

**Rationale:** History has shown that the physical inclusion of students related to gender, disability, race and national origin does not occur without strong leadership and support at all levels. The state must require that local school districts take steps to include students from diverse backgrounds in attendance centers, educational programs, courses and extra-curricular activities. It must then create incentives and provide support services that help districts implement those steps. Local leaders must be able to effectively communicate the benefits that diversity brings to the community as well as the teaching and learning environment. Community leaders including school leaders must be the catalysts for activities in the community, which build bridges between diverse groups of citizens.

**11. State policies for creating and sustaining inclusive schools should provide clear expectations and at the same time allow for flexibility at the local level.**

**Rationale:** The specific nature of the steps taken to include students from diverse backgrounds in attendance centers, programs, courses and activities should be determined at the local level. Every community is unique and local citizens know their community best. Diverse groups within the community must be engaged in deliberative conversations about what those steps will be or they will fail.

**12. Having one's children attend a school near to their home is a significant convenience, not a legal right nor necessarily an educational advantage. Recognizing this convenience, involuntary transportation of students to schools that are not contiguous to their school of residence should be avoided.**

**Rationale:** Districts with inclusion plans must balance the realization of this convenience with the importance of reducing racial and socio-economic polarization within schools and communities and the need to provide educational alternatives for students and their families.

**13. School districts must take steps to create inclusive schools. If after these steps**

**are taken, isolated schools (racial, ethnic, socio-economic, disability) still exist, the school district will be held to the same high levels of accountability for high academic achievement in those schools as other schools in the district.**

**Rationale:** There may be valid reasons why a school district's efforts to include students from diverse backgrounds in schools may not achieve true inclusion in one or more schools. The school district should be held to the same levels of accountability for high academic achievement in those schools as it is for other schools in the district. The state should provide guidance for overcoming the impact of concentrated poverty on learning and monitor them closely. The achievement of all students should be monitored at the local and state level on the basis of race, national origin, gender, disability and socio-economic status.

**14. Local school boards should consider inclusion on the basis of race, national origin, socio-economic status, gender and disability, when they make decisions related to the construction, remodeling and closing of schools, the drawing of attendance boundaries, the development of vertical feeder systems and the placement of specialized programs and services.**

**Rationale:** School board members are community leaders who must build bridges to bring diverse groups within their community together. School boards make decisions related to the above issues several times each year. The decisions either bring students from diverse backgrounds closer together or further separate them. If inclusion is one of the factors considered, a significant degree of racial and socio-economic isolation can be prevented.

**15. Students with disabilities and students who are English language learners should have access to the appropriate special instructional services and support systems at their school of residence.**

**Rationale:** The transportation of English language learners and students with disabilities to centralized sites for educational services may create isolation on the basis of race, national origin, disability or socio-economic status. If they must be transported to another attendance center, the site selected should result in greater inclusion rather than greater isolation. On the other hand, if an English language learner's home school is racially or socio-economically isolated, they should have the choice to attend another school and receive the educational service needed.

**16. School districts should be able to deny both internal and external open enrollment requests that adversely impact a board adopted integration plan or which contribute to racial isolation in a district that has no way to integrate internally. Neighboring school districts should collaborate with such districts to implement strategies that will reduce their racial and socio-economic isolation.**

**Rationale:** Concentrated poverty and racial isolation create the same barriers to high levels of achievement when they occur in a district as a whole as they do when they occur in one or more attendance centers within a district.